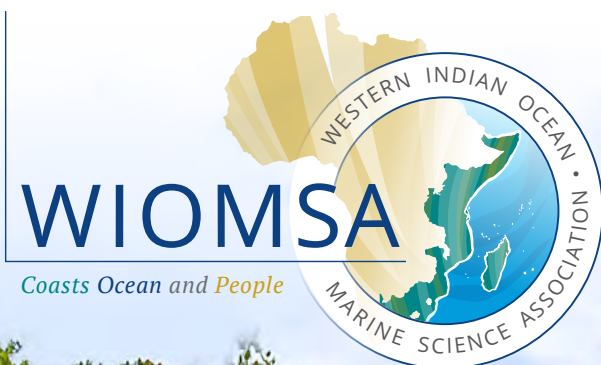


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NEWS BRIEF



WHAT'S INSIDE?

POLICY: SHAPING DECISIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

- 1 COP 12 sets a new course for the Western Indian Ocean.
- 2 Making Seagrass Visible.
- 3 Making Blue Carbon Count in the Western Indian Ocean.
- 4 The road to a regional trust fund.
- 5 Women need stronger influence over policy, investment and ocean governance.
- 6 Four Decades of Marine Conservation: What Will Make Progress Last.
- 7 Youth claim a seat at the table at COP12
- 8 The International Partnership on MPAs, Biodiversity and Climate Change becomes UN Ocean Decade endorsed activity under MARCOP

CAPACITY: BUILDING SKILLS AND EMPOWERING PEOPLE

- 9 A Wall That Tells a Bigger Story.
- 10 Building ocean science capacity across Africa.
- 11 Reading the ocean's genetic fingerprints.
- 12 Who pays for protection? Five researchers take on marine conservation finance.
- 13 Turning Data into Decisions.
- 14 Building Capacity for Affordable Coastal Monitoring: The joint VOKCE-COLaB Summer Camp.

SCIENCE: GENERATING KNOWLEDGE THROUGH DATA AND RESEARCH

- 15 Moving Beyond the Map: LaSMMI Connects Seagrass Science, Carbon and Conservation
- 16 Building Coastal Resilience in Mauritius.
- 17 Regional partners advance mangrove and seagrass assessments
- 18 Community-Led Conservation can help Safeguard Kenya's Blue Carbon.
- 19 Improving seagrass identification for better conservation.
- 20 Learning from the Reef.

NETWORKS

- 21 A New Wave of Ocean Action.
- 22 Strengthening conservation through gender-transformative approaches.

COUNTRY NEWS: UPDATES FROM WIOMSA MEMBERS

- 23 Advancing research, restoration and community action in Mauritius
- 24 Seychelles: Advancing Ocean Research, Governance and Public Engagement

NEW PUBLICATIONS

- 25 New WIOMSA Publications

COES-WIO 2026: Participants on a field trip as part of the shoreline change project track activities

COP 12 SETS A NEW COURSE FOR THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN



FIFTEEN DECISIONS ADOPTED IN DAR ES SALAAM ADDRESS OCEAN GOVERNANCE, BIODIVERSITY, POLLUTION AND THE BLUE ECONOMY.

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania – After four days of negotiations, countries bordering the Western Indian Ocean left Dar es Salaam with 15 new decisions covering some of the region’s most pressing ocean challenges – from disappearing habitats and plastic pollution to the growing competition for ocean space.

The 12th Conference of the Parties to the Nairobi Convention (COP12), which concluded on 9 October 2026, brought together more than 1,500 participants, including representatives of the Convention’s 10 Contracting Parties, scientists, conservation organisations, development partners and coastal stakeholders.

Hosted by Tanzania under the theme “Towards a Sustainable Blue Economy in the Western Indian Ocean for People and

Nature: A Journey of Forty Years,” the meeting also marked four decades of regional cooperation on the marine and coastal environment.

Read the decisions here:

[COP12_Adopted_Decisions_09102026_EN.pdf](#)

But the significance of COP12 will depend less on what countries agreed in Dar es Salaam than on what happens next.

The 15 decisions span ocean governance, biodiversity conservation, pollution, marine spatial planning and sustainable economic development. Together, they create a framework for countries to turn regional commitments into national policies, investments and action.



Managing an increasingly crowded ocean

One of the clearest messages from COP12 was the need to manage the Western Indian Ocean as a connected system rather than a collection of separate national waters and sectors.

Decisions on a Regional Ocean Governance Strategy, marine spatial planning and information management call for stronger coordination across national boundaries and between sectors such as fisheries, conservation, tourism, ports, shipping and emerging blue-economy industries.

The challenge is becoming increasingly urgent. As governments look to the ocean for economic growth, more activities are competing for the same marine space – while the ecosystems supporting coastal economies are themselves under growing pressure.

COP12 also advanced implementation of the Nairobi Convention's Integrated Work Programme 2025–2035 and its Ecosystem Indicator Monitoring Framework. The framework is intended to give countries a common way of tracking changes in marine and coastal ecosystems – and ultimately of determining whether regional commitments are producing ecological results.

From coral reefs to the high seas

Several decisions focus directly on biodiversity.

Parties agreed to strengthen conservation, restoration and management of critical habitats, including mangroves, seagrass meadows and coral reefs. These ecosystems support fisheries and tourism, store carbon, protect coastlines and sustain millions of people living along the Western Indian Ocean.

The decision also highlights a persistent challenge for the region: restoring ecosystems is not enough if the pressures that degraded them remain.

Long-term recovery will depend on effective management, sustained financing and monitoring that measures ecological outcomes rather than simply hectares restored or activities completed.

COP12 also connected regional action to the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and addressed implementation of the Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction, or BBNJ Agreement.

For Western Indian Ocean countries, the high-seas agreement opens a new frontier for regional cooperation. Building scientific, technical and negotiating capacity will be critical if countries are to participate effectively in decisions over marine biodiversity beyond their national waters.



Tackling pollution before it reaches the ocean

Plastic pollution received particular attention, with countries backing a life-cycle approach. That represents an important shift in emphasis.

Rather than treating plastic pollution primarily as a problem of waste already on beaches or in the sea, a life-cycle approach looks upstream – at how plastics are designed, produced, consumed, reused and ultimately discarded.

Parties also strengthened regional cooperation on preparedness and response to marine pollution incidents through the Regional Contingency Plan.

Oil spills and other pollution events do not respect national borders. Effective response therefore depends on countries being able to share information, expertise and resources quickly when incidents occur.

Putting the ocean onto the economic balance sheet

Another group of decisions tackles a less visible problem: much of the economic value generated by healthy marine ecosystems remains poorly captured in conventional national accounts.

COP12 decisions on economic valuation and ocean accounting seek to change that.

Making the contribution of coral reefs, mangroves, fisheries and other marine ecosystems more visible in economic decision-making could influence how governments plan infrastructure, allocate public expenditure and assess investments.

The conference also called for greater investment in an inclusive and sustainable blue economy.

But here, too, implementation will matter.

Investment labelled “blue” will not necessarily be sustainable. The test will be whether new economic activity maintains ecosystem health, supports sustainable livelihoods and creates meaningful opportunities for coastal communities – including women and young people.

Fifteen decisions – one test

COP12 ended with an ambitious regional agenda. The harder work now begins.

The Nairobi Convention Secretariat, governments and their partners must translate the 15 decisions into national plans, budgets, policies and programmes – and coordinate them across a region stretching from Somalia to South Africa and the Western Indian Ocean islands.

Forty years after countries first came together under the Nairobi Convention, another set of commitments is therefore not, by itself, the measure of success.

The real indicators will be visible in the ocean: healthier coral reefs, mangroves and seagrasses; less pollution entering coastal waters; better-managed marine areas; and coastal communities whose livelihoods improve alongside conservation.

COP12 has set the direction. Its legacy will depend on whether the Western Indian Ocean looks different because of it.

MAKING SEAGRASS VISIBLE



Seagrass meadows support fisheries, store carbon, shelter marine life and help protect coastlines across the Western Indian Ocean. But in parts of the region, a more basic problem complicates efforts to protect them: scientists and governments still don't have a complete picture of where the meadows are, what condition they are in, or how quickly they are changing.

A new regional assessment aims to help fill that gap.

Researchers and practitioners from 53 institutions have pooled available knowledge from 10 Western Indian Ocean countries, producing a comprehensive country-by-country assessment of the region's seagrass knowledge, management and conservation priorities.

The effort involved 83 authors and resulted in 10 national seagrass outlook reports covering Comoros, Kenya, Réunion, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa and Tanzania, alongside a regional synthesis.

WIOMSA and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) launched the publications on Oct. 9 at the 12th Conference of the Parties to the Nairobi Convention (COP12) in Dar es Salaam.

What we know – and what we don't

Taken together, the reports reveal a region where knowledge of seagrass remains uneven.

Some countries have relatively well-established research and monitoring programs. Elsewhere, significant gaps remain in habitat mapping, species identification and long-term ecological monitoring.

There is another problem: countries do not always collect and report information in the same way.

That makes it difficult to compare the condition of seagrass ecosystems across the Western Indian Ocean or determine whether they are improving or declining over time.

These gaps have practical consequences.



A seagrass meadow that is absent from a habitat map can also be absent from a marine spatial plan. Without long-term monitoring, degradation may be detected only after significant change has already occurred. And without comparable data, governments can struggle to determine where limited conservation resources would have the greatest impact.

Building a regional picture

The regional synthesis, *Seagrasses in the Western Indian Ocean: A regional synthesis of knowledge, evidence gaps and priorities for conservation and management*, brings the country assessments together with published research, policy and management experience and the emerging application of the IUCN Red List of Ecosystems.

Its value lies partly in showing what is missing.

By identifying gaps in mapping, monitoring and ecological knowledge, the assessment can help countries decide where new research and investment are most urgently needed.

It also points toward greater regional cooperation.

Seagrass meadows occur across national boundaries, and many of the pressures affecting them – including coastal

development, pollution, deteriorating water quality and climate change – are shared across the region.

Yet the information used to manage them remains largely fragmented by country.

The collaboration behind the reports offers an opportunity to change that by improving data sharing, harmonizing monitoring approaches and building a more comparable picture of ecosystem condition across the Western Indian Ocean.

Getting seagrass into the room

Better information, however, does not automatically translate into better conservation.

The bigger test is whether seagrass becomes more visible in the decisions that determine what happens along the coast: marine spatial planning, fisheries management, protected and conserved areas, climate policy, restoration programs and public and private investment.

That made the decision to launch the assessments at COP12 significant.

The event brought researchers and conservation practitioners together with policymakers, including



Presentation from Madagascar

Seychelles' Minister of Environment, Climate, Energy and Natural Resources, Marie-May Jeremie, and Mauritius' Minister Delegate for Agro-Industry, Food Security, the Blue Economy and Fisheries, Fabrice Gilles David.

The ministers expressed their willingness to champion the reports through national, regional and international platforms.

Such political backing could be important for an ecosystem that has often received less attention than coral reefs and mangroves, despite its importance to coastal communities and marine biodiversity.

From maps to management

The 10 reports represent a snapshot of current knowledge. Their longer-term value will depend on what happens next.

The network of 83 authors and 53 institutions behind them could provide the basis for more coordinated research and monitoring across the region, allowing countries to fill common evidence gaps rather than addressing them independently.

The challenge is also to ensure that better information changes decisions.

More seagrass mapped does not necessarily mean more seagrass protected. More monitoring does not necessarily result in better management. The connection between evidence, policy and conservation action still has to be made.

For the Western Indian Ocean, progress could eventually be measured in practical terms: whether previously undocumented meadows appear on national maps; whether countries monitor their condition consistently; whether seagrass features in marine spatial plans and conservation investments; and whether management responds when those ecosystems begin to decline.

After bringing together 10 countries, 83 authors and 53 institutions, the region has a clearer picture of what it knows about seagrass – and where the blind spots remain.

Making those meadows visible is the first step. What countries do with that visibility will determine whether it leads to conservation.

The initiative was coordinated under the Western Indian Ocean Coastal and Ocean Resilience Programme in partnership with IUCN, research institutions and regional partners. WIOMSA and IUCN acknowledge support from the Indian Ocean Commission through the RECOS Project, funded by the Agence Française de Développement and the Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial.

MAKING BLUE CARBON COUNT IN THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN.



Governments, regional partners, conservationists and scientists met at COP12 of the Nairobi Convention in Dar es Salaam to explore how political leadership, scientific evidence and pathways to sustainable finance can accelerate blue carbon conservation across the Western Indian Ocean.

Blue carbon ecosystems such as mangroves, seagrasses and salt marshes sustain biodiversity, fisheries, livelihoods and climate resilience, yet they continue to be lost. Reversing this trend will require stronger alignment among science, policy, and sustained investment to deliver conservation outcomes at scale.

These themes shaped the regional side event, **From Commitments to Action: Upscaling Blue Carbon Ecosystem Conservation, Sustainable Management, and Investment Across the Western Indian Ocean**, held on 7 October 2026 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The event was convened by Tanzania, Kenya and Seychelles with the Nairobi Convention Secretariat, Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA), Fauna & Flora, the East African Wildlife Society, Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT), The Pew Charitable Trusts and other regional partners.

Political leadership and regional priorities

Government representatives from Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, and Tanzania highlighted a shared ambition to accelerate blue carbon conservation across the region through stronger institutional coordination, national implementation and sustained regional cooperation. Importantly the discussion moved beyond showcasing high-level ambition, to explore several key policy frameworks and implementation tools that are being put into practice: the Western Indian Ocean Regional Mangrove Action Plan, the Regional Seagrass Strategy, Kenya's Blue Carbon Ecosystems NDC Implementation and Investment Plan, and Tanzania's Blue Carbon Accounting Framework. Together, these instruments demonstrate how countries are moving to concrete actions while aligning national priorities with regional conservation and climate goals.

Strengthening the science, policy and finance interface

Bringing together experts in science, policy, finance, and country engagement, this session examined solutions for moving from knowledge to effective conservation across the region. Discussions highlighted the need for reliable, accessible data, regional information sharing and stronger science-to-policy pathways to support decisionmaking. Panelists also explored a range of financing approaches including climate

finance, blended finance, public-private partnerships and community-based financing. A clear takeaway from the session was that achieving meaningful conservation outcomes at scale will require closer collaboration and partnerships that connect knowledge, decision-making and investment. Connecting these efforts will help better safeguard blue carbon ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.

Western Indian Ocean Regional Seagrass Strategy 2026–2035 adopted at COP12

A milestone for regional seagrass conservation

At the 12th Conference of the Parties (COP12) to the Nairobi Convention in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Contracting Parties adopted the *Western Indian Ocean Regional Seagrass Strategy 2026–2035* through **Decision CP12/10 on the Conservation, Restoration and Management of Critical Habitats**. The decision calls for the Strategy's implementation and stronger measures to conserve, restore and sustainably manage critical habitats, including seagrasses, mangroves and salt marshes. It also requests the Nairobi Convention Secretariat and partners to support resource mobilisation for implementation.

Developed through a regionally led, consultative process under the WIO-Consortium Seagrass Working Group, the Strategy provides a common framework

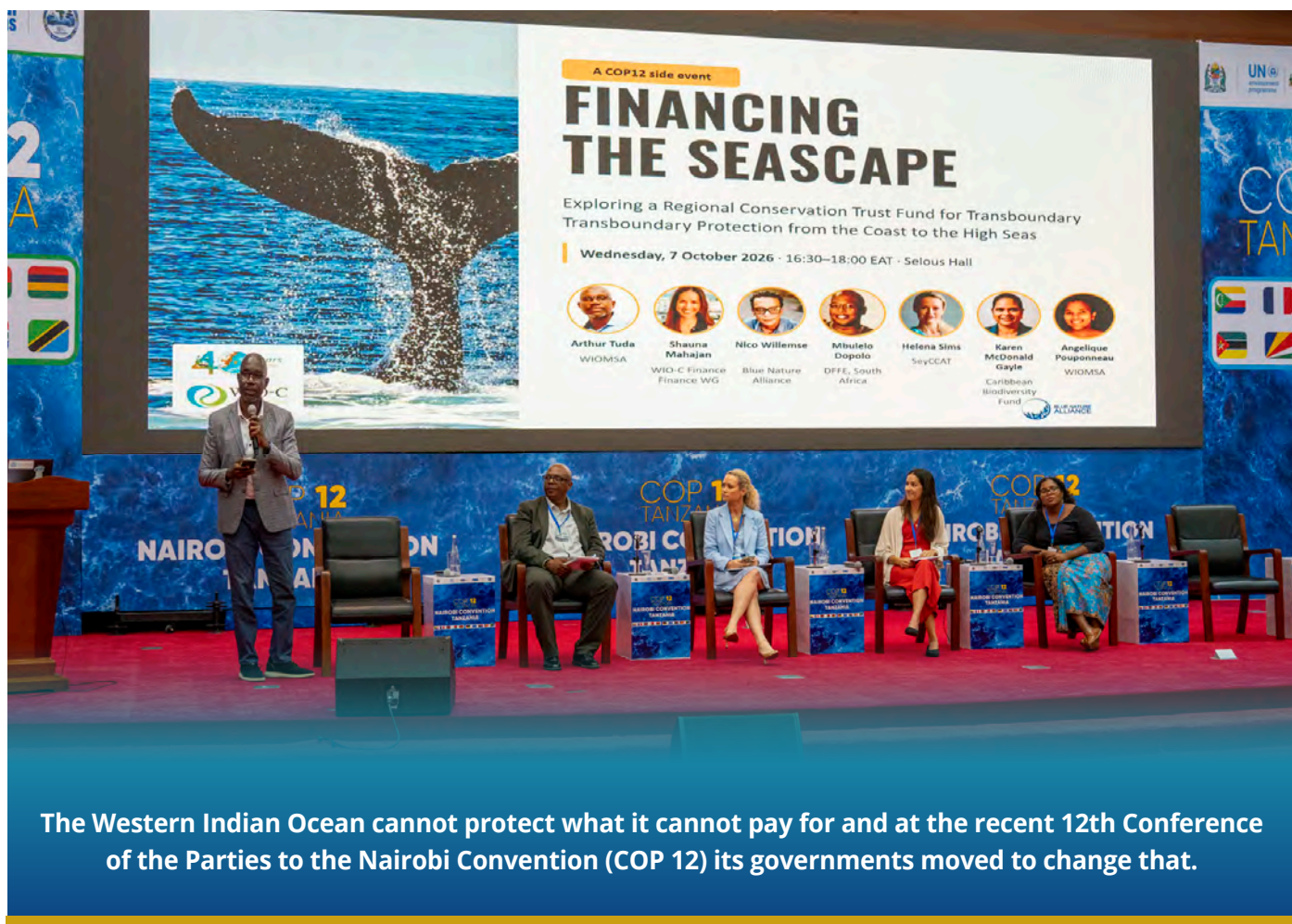
for strengthening seagrass conservation across the Western Indian Ocean. It connects four key areas – **knowledge, policy, finance and implementation** – to help countries translate scientific evidence into decisions, mobilise sustainable financing and deliver effective conservation and restoration measures.

Adoption marks an important milestone, but implementation is the next step. Priorities include developing a Regional Action Plan, assessing national needs and readiness, integrating seagrass into national planning and management, mobilising investment, and monitoring progress. The Strategy provides a shared regional direction while allowing countries to advance according to their national contexts and capacities.



THE ROAD TO A REGIONAL TRUST FUND

By Angelique Poupponeau



The Western Indian Ocean cannot protect what it cannot pay for and at the recent 12th Conference of the Parties to the Nairobi Convention (COP 12) its governments moved to change that.

They asked the Secretariat, with partners, to develop a regional conservation trust fund for adoption at COP 13 (decision CP.12/14).

After decades of fragmented, short-term funding, the region now has a mandate and a deadline to build long-term finance for the ocean it shares.

The political will is there. Ahead of COP 12, Seychelles' Minister of Environment, Climate, Energy and Natural Resources, Hon. Marie-May Jeremie, called for a government-led next phase for a regional fund and invited international partners to invest early in a regionally owned mechanism.

"Reefs do not recover according to project deadlines, just as fisheries won't be replenished in sync with funding cycles. Conservation requires continuity" she wrote in an opinion piece [Conserving a Connected Ocean](#).

Only a handful of COP12 events were dedicated to sustainable finance, yet the need for it surfaced across the board. For

instance, the newly launched Western Indian Ocean (WIO) Regional Seagrass Synthesis Report, the baseline for delivering the Regional Seagrass Strategy, calls for targeted investment to protect intact meadows. Discussions on youth made the same point: young people's participation in implementing the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions Agreement depends on dedicated funding.

At the Northern Mozambique Channel (NMC) session, WWF presented the work under way there, including the proposed [NMC Blue Hub](#). The Channel's ecosystem services are worth an estimated USD 5.5 billion a year; managing it sustainably would cost about USD 18.6 million a year. The return on protection is not in question, but the money is.

Decision CP.12/14 builds on COP 11 in 2024, where Parties mandated a long-term regional sustainable financing mechanism, and on the Blue Finance Platform being developed to deliver it. A regional conservation trust fund (RCTF) is now a named part of that architecture, with COP13 as its deadline.

A gap measured in hundreds of millions

Early scoping for a Western Indian Ocean RCTF, led by the WIO-C Finance Working Group and presented by Dr Angelique Pouponneau, puts hard numbers on the problem. Protection is low, funding is short-term and donor-dependent, and transboundary seascapes receive no dedicated funding at all.

- **Protection:** only about 10 percent of the region's waters are in marine protected areas, against a 30 percent target.
- **Funding:** roughly USD 50 million to USD 90 million a year, mostly short-term donor projects, of which only about half of committed aid is actually disbursed.
- **The gap:** USD 25 million to USD 40 million a year for priority transboundary areas, rising to USD 330 million to USD 560 million a year for regional 30×30 targets.

The WIO's financing landscape is fragmented: funds appear for a single issue, project or country, then close when the

project ends. A regional fund that becomes one more short-term project would fail the region.

The session was clear about where an RCTF adds value: transboundary protected areas. Transboundary here does not mean the line between two neighbouring states. It means ecological connectivity: the migration routes, larval pathways and linked habitats that tie the region's ecosystems together, from the coast to the high seas. National funds protect places; a regional fund can finance the connections between them.

The cost of not having such a fund is already visible. Nairobi Convention Parties backed a Kenya-Tanzania marine transboundary conservation area in [decisions CP8/6 \(2015\) and CP9/7 \(2018\)](#). A decade on, it still has no formal joint management, held back by a lack of sustained funding.

The mandate exists. The evidence exists. What the region needs now is an anchor donor and a government-led decision on governance so that a fund is ready for adoption at COP13.

Getting the design right

The panel was clear that an RCTF will only add value if it is designed well from the start.

- **For Contracting Parties,** governance comes first: governments need to understand whether they will be represented in the governance, what they would put in and how their countries would benefit.
- **For national funds such as SeyCCAT,** an RCTF should work with national conservation trust funds where they exist, for scale, collaboration and coordination, with clear mandates so they complement rather than compete.
- **From the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund,** now in its 15th year: a regional fund is a catalyst, not an implementer and governance is the hardest part to get right.
- **From WWF's experience,** funding should be evidence-based: an accompanying conservation plan that maps ecological connectivity gives donors a clear case for investment, and the fund's design must be participatory.
- **From the Blue Nature Alliance,** speaking as a funder: "If our financing only follows political boundaries, our conservation impact will always be limited." Funders look for three things: regional ownership, credible governance and measurable impact. The most powerful step countries can take in the next 12 months is to show collective commitment to a shared vision for the fund, because capital follows credibility.

FINANCING THE SEASCAPE

A Regional Conservation Trust
Fund for Transboundary
Protection
from the coast to the high seas

A COP12 Side Event
07 October 2026 | Nairobi



Scan to read the policy brief

WOMEN NEED STRONGER INFLUENCE OVER POLICY, INVESTMENT AND OCEAN GOVERNANCE

| *By Obakeng Molelu and Celina Razanajaosoa*



Across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO), women are generating scientific evidence, restoring coastal ecosystems, building enterprises and contributing to coastal communities' resilience and ocean governance. Their knowledge and leadership are already shaping the region's blue economy. Yet a critical question remains: how can this expertise translate into greater influence over policies, investments and decisions?

This question was at the heart of "Women in Blue Economy in the WIO Region: Leadership, Innovation, and Inclusive Governance," a side event convened by WIOMSA during the 12th Conference of Parties to the Nairobi Convention in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in October.

Facilitated by Dr Obakeng Molelu, WIOMSA's Science to Policy Programme Manager, with Dr Yvonne Waweru moderating a panel discussion, the session brought together scientists, policymakers, entrepreneurs and regional partners to explore how to strengthen women's leadership, expand access to investment and ensure their meaningful participation in the regional blue economy.

Hon. Dr Dorothy Gwajima, Tanzania's Minister for Community Development, Gender, Women and Special Groups, opened the session, calling for gender-disaggregated blue economy data to be brought into parliamentary discussions to help secure national budget allocations for women-led initiatives.

In her keynote address, **Dr Jacqueline Uku** of the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRRI) offered a powerful reflection on the realities of women's leadership. She emphasized that overcoming systemic barriers requires persistence, strategic thinking, courage and the willingness to learn from setbacks. But her message extended beyond individual resilience. Established leaders, she argued, have a responsibility to cultivate alliances, mentor emerging professionals and actively open doors for the next generation.

Dr Amina Juma Hamza of KMFRRI drew on her work in blue carbon and mangrove restoration to highlight the importance of recognizing women not merely as participants in conservation initiatives, but as leaders whose knowledge and experience strengthen environmental decision-making.

Maliehaa Sumar of The People & Planet Group, showcased the potential of regenerative enterprises to create value, strengthen livelihoods and support community ownership.

These examples demonstrated that women are not waiting to be included in the blue economy. They are already developing solutions that connect ecosystem protection with economic opportunities.

The conversation on investment challenged the idea that providing funding is enough to support women entrepreneurs.

Helena Sims, Chief Executive Officer of the Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT), highlighted the importance of catalytic seed funding, accessible financing mechanisms and continued technical support. Drawing on SeyCCAT's experience, she explained how financial instruments can be adapted to help women-led initiatives move from promising ideas towards long-term sustainability.

Dr Jessica Fraser of Nelson Mandela University Business School in South Africa, complemented this perspective by emphasizing financial literacy, market understanding, negotiation and business viability. Entrepreneurs, she argued, must understand not only how to spend an investment but also how to generate revenue and sustain their businesses.

Sinikinesh Beyene Jimma of the United Nations Environment Programme emphasized that meaningful participation cannot be measured simply by the number of women attending meetings. What matters is whose voices are heard, whose knowledge shapes priorities and who influences the decisions affecting marine ecosystems and coastal communities.

Looking towards the next generation, **Hellen Njeri Kuria** of the High Seas Alliance highlighted the need to develop a strong pipeline of African women ocean negotiators. She called for structured mentorship, specialized training and funded shadowing opportunities that would enable emerging professionals to gain practical experience alongside established negotiators.

Jacqueline Owden of WAJAMAMA Community Health placed well-being at the centre of sustained leadership.

Priority interventions for impact

- **Move evidence into policy and budgets.** Package women-led science and gender-disaggregated data for parliamentary briefings, national planning and Nairobi Convention processes.
- **Build accessible finance and enterprise support.** Connect grants and long-term investment with mentoring, financial literacy, value addition and market access.
- **Invest in future negotiators.** Create funded training, mentorship and delegation-shadowing opportunities, with deliberate entry points for young women.
- **Measure women's influence.** Track evidence incorporated into decisions, finance accessed and enterprises reaching profitability, alongside participation.
- **Institutionalize well-being.** Adopt workplace measures that protect psychological safety, enable access to care and support sustained leadership.



FOUR DECADES OF MARINE CONSERVATION: WHAT WILL MAKE PROGRESS LAST?



Expanding marine protection must go hand-in-hand with stronger management, sustained financing and community leadership. This was the central message of the Western Indian Ocean Marine Protected Areas Management Network (WIOMPAN) session at the Nairobi Convention COP12, held on 9 October 2026 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Convened by WIOMPAN with WIOMSA, the Indian Ocean Commission and MIHARI, the session drew on four decades of marine conservation experience in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) to identify investment priorities towards 2030. Discussions focused on what protected and conserved areas need to deliver lasting ecological and socioeconomic benefits – not simply greater coverage.

Regional management effectiveness assessments highlighted persistent gaps in staffing, equipment, operational funding and enforcement and monitoring, despite stronger planning and institutional foundations. Addressing these weaknesses requires reliable core budgets, staff development and retention and resources to keep operations running beyond individual projects.

A patrol operation, for example, needs more than a boat: it requires trained staff, fuel, maintenance and functioning management systems. Conservation investment should support this full package rather than isolated purchases.

Participants also stressed the need to connect assessments with action. Ecological and socioeconomic monitoring, research partnerships and practical tools should help managers understand what works and adapt their decisions. Assessment findings need to lead to funded improvement plans, followed by reviews of progress.

Put community stewardship at the centre

The session explored how recognition of other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) could support existing community stewardship. Recognition should be community-led, consent-based and rights-affirming, with meaningful participation by women, youth and diverse resource users.

For recognition to deliver benefits, communities need clear management roles and rights, accountable local institutions, fair benefit-sharing and support for resolving conflicts. Technical and financial assistance must follow recognition without displacing local authority or creating unfunded responsibilities.

Madagascar's capacity development and certification programme for locally managed marine areas offered a practical example. Combining competence standards, assessment, targeted training and certification of community management structures, the approach supports skills in leadership, financial management, stakeholder engagement and ecological monitoring. Adapted to local contexts, it could help strengthen community conservation elsewhere in the region. Certification can support readiness for OECM assessment but does not replace evidence that OECM criteria are met.

Turn regional experience into lasting results

Regional networks and long-term partnerships can connect managers and communities with technical expertise, peer learning and coordinated support. WIOMPAN, WIOMSA, the Indian Ocean Commission, MIHARI, Consortium for the Conservation of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems in the Western Indian Ocean and partners can help link these needs with financing and learning opportunities.

The proposed next step is practical: translate assessment findings into costed site-level improvement plans, strengthen community management capacity and track changes in management performance, equity and biodiversity outcomes.



The message for governments, partners and funders was clear – progress towards 2030 should be judged not only by the area conserved, but by whether investments build the capacity and institutions needed to sustain results.

YOUTH CLAIM A SEAT AT THE TABLE AT COP12



The session brought together government representatives, young scientists, entrepreneurs and conservation practitioners and examined how youth and early career ocean professionals (ECOPs) can help shape a sustainable blue economy in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO).

It was opened by Hon. **Marie-May Jeremie, Seychelles' Minister for Environment, Climate, Energy and Natural Resources and WIOMSA President**, who stressed that talent needs mentorship, research training, leadership development and access to decision-making. **Hon. Dr Joel Nanauka, Tanzania's Minister responsible for Youth Development**, called for stronger links between education, research, industry, markets and policy so that skills lead to jobs and innovations become viable enterprises.

Keynote speaker **Frida Amani, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Advocate for Ecosystem Restoration** and founder of the Amani Foundation, challenged institutions to give young people real influence. She called for youth involvement from the outset of marine spatial planning, restoration and policy processes, backed by resources to act.

Two innovative presentations demonstrated the potential of youth-led enterprises. **Bosco Barnabas Mtwewe**, founder of Marine CoirTech Enterprise and a University of South Africa researcher, presented fishing and seaweed-farming equipment made from discarded coconut husks as an alternative to synthetic materials. **Sarobidy Rakotonjatovo** of the University of Toliara and founder of Menatsook presented sustainable sea-urchin products for food, cosmetics and decoration, linking ecosystem management with income for coastal women and youth. Both highlighted finance, technology transfer, product development and markets as essential for scaling up.

Moderated by **Esther Mhamila** of Action for Ocean Tanzania, the panel explored practical support. **Prof. Bernerd Fulanda** of Pwani University called for structured youth contributions to scientific assessments and policy processes, challenging the WIO-ECOP network to demonstrate measurable progress towards COP13. **Bernard Iha** of Kumbatia Seafood urged entrepreneurs to understand market demand, build community trust and demonstrate viable returns, with finance progressing from prototype grants to growth capital.

Edwin Mwashinga of IOC-UNESCO Africa advocated resourced regional networks, multilingual inclusion and connectivity for island and underserved coastal communities. Asandiswa Nonyukela of WILDTRUST and Youth4MPAs stressed youth-defined capacity needs, including proposal-writing, finance, cross-country learning and representation in marine protected-area management.

Haira Kassim of Visiter les Comores highlighted tourism co-designed with fishers and communities, using digital communication to reach markets while protecting natural and cultural assets. Emmanuelle Horeau, a maritime-law and ocean-governance practitioner from Seychelles, called for career pathways built on mentorship, internships, regional exposure and progressive responsibility.

Frank Mirobo of the University of Dodoma and Tracy Dube of WILDTRUST facilitated the audience dialogue. The discussion emphasized sustained opportunities and accountability for how youth recommendations influence decisions.

Priorities for regional action

- **Formalise youth leadership** through funded roles in delegations, assessments, planning and Nairobi Convention structures.
- **Finance enterprise growth** with accessible grants, patient capital, technical support and market connections.
- **Strengthen WIO ECOP networks** through multilingual platforms and inclusion of island and underserved communities.
- **Build lasting career pathways** with paid internships, mentorship, fellowships and regional exchanges.
- **Track progress towards COP13** on youth evidence informing policy, funding accessed and employment and conservation outcomes.

Young writers celebrated

The winners of the UNEP Nairobi Convention Secretariat's COP12 Youth Essay Competition were announced at the Youth Session. The competition encouraged youth perspectives on ocean governance, conservation and the sustainable blue economy to inform COP12 discussions.

Congratulations to:

- **Irene Jeremiah Thambikeni** (Institute of Marine Sciences of the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania);
- **Stephanie Nicolaides** (University of the Western Cape, South Africa); and
- **Immanuel Mwendwa Kiilu** (Strathmore University, Kenya).

THE INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP ON MPAS, BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE BECOMES UN OCEAN DECADE ENDORSED ACTIVITY UNDER WIOMSA MARCOP



Seagrass surveys & training in Madagascar

The International Partnership on MPAs, Biodiversity and Climate Change becomes UN Ocean Decade endorsed activity under WIOMSA MARCOP

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) has established strong working relationships with [WIOMSA MARCOP](#), and many of the countries in the WIO region through the recently completed [Ocean Country Partnership Programme \(OCP\)](#). JNCC is continuing collaboration with WIO colleagues through the [International Partnership on MPAs, Biodiversity and Climate Change \(IPMPABCC\)](#), which officially became a UN Ocean Decade endorsed project in September.

We are absolutely delighted that our joint work and achievements with the WIOMSA MARCOP are being recognised. The endorsement highlights JNCC and the UK's ongoing commitment to continuing collaboration and knowledge exchange with our WIO colleagues.

The IPMPABCC is an alliance of government agencies and organisations from across the world, working together to progress the evidence base around the role of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and biodiversity in tackling climate change.

The Partnership's vision is for global decision makers to implement MPA networks as nature-based solutions for biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.

JNCC, currently leads and coordinates the work of the International Partnership, working alongside partners to develop work plans that compliment country level delivery and supports progress towards the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) Target 3.

The UN Ocean Decade endorsement presents a significant opportunity to advance the evidence base for MPAs in the WIO region and throughout the world. It will allow continued collaboration with the MARCOP team to ensure we support their achievement of Target 3. In the short term, WIO colleagues are collaborating on current work areas for the International Partnership, including a marine spatial planning (MSP), MPAs and climate symposium in January 2027. Longer-term, the International Partnership and JNCC look forward to working with WIO colleagues to develop aligned work plans to enhance our shared visions and goals.

A WALL THAT TELLS A BIGGER STORY

| By Rob Barnes, Jacqueline Uku, Amina Juma Hamza, and Kipkorir Sigi Lang'at



Outside the Vanga Blue Forest office on Kenya's south coast, a colourful mural now covers a once plain wall. It shows mangroves, fishing, education and community life, alongside the ways in which income from blue carbon credits moves through the project and supports local priorities.

The figures will be updated each year, turning the wall into a public record that residents can return to, question and compare. Its value lies not only in what it shows, but also in how it was made.

The work formed part of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation-funded [Strengthening Sustainable Blue Food Systems in Coastal Kenya project](#). [GRID-Arendal](#) worked with the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFR), [Vanga Blue Forest](#), [Mikoko Pamoja](#), the [Association for Coastal Ecosystem Services \(ACES\)](#), local artist [Hafidh Omari](#) and Vanga residents.

The team first asked what the mural should achieve and what information it should make public. A draft was shared with around 20 community members and later revised. The design moved between artists, scientists, project staff and residents. KMFR checked the science, project teams tested ideas locally, and artist Hafidh Omari reviewed the images through the lens of culture and place. Consultation continued throughout the painting process.

As Hafidh explained: "As an artist, I learned that public art is not only about expressing your own ideas. It is also about listening. The best murals are created with the community, not just for the community."



A wall becomes a classroom

Over eight days the wall became a meeting place for children, fishers and residents. The site became an outdoor classroom for questions about mangroves, wildlife, fishing, conservation and carbon finance. Capacity-building did not flow in only one direction. Scientists learned from residents and artists, while communications staff learned from scientific and local practitioners.

Dr James Kairo, Chief Scientist at KMFRI, reflected on the exchange: "Our science is rooted in local knowledge of mangroves and associated biodiversity. Clear communication of our findings, active listening to community concerns, and transparency about how the project operates are essential to building trust and ensuring its integrity."

Blue carbon projects can be difficult to understand from technical documents alone. The mural presents the project's basic financial model in a public place and shows what share of carbon income supports education, healthcare, water, livelihoods and conservation.

Meali Mohamed Maule, Project Coordinator at Vanga Blue Forest, described the mural as a visible commitment: "It's a public commitment, painted in colour, that says this is not a black box. This is your forest, your credits, your benefits, and you have a right to see the whole chain."

The lesson is not that every project needs a mural, but that communication is stronger when communities, artists, scientists and project teams shape it together.

Steven Lutz, Senior Blue Carbon Advisor at GRID-Arendal, summed up the wider lesson: "Blue carbon projects will only be as strong as the trust around them. Vanga shows that science, community ownership, finance and communication have to be built together from the start."

Hafidh's inspiration to create ocean art can be found in the article ["The breathing roots of time: A story of mangroves"](#) in the WIOMSA Ocean Literacies Magazine.

BUILDING OCEAN SCIENCE CAPACITY ACROSS AFRICA

| By Frank Mirobo, Blandina Lugendo and John Mbugani



The second edition of the Coastal Ocean Environment School in the Western Indian Ocean (COES-WIO) brought together aspiring ocean professionals for a week of practical, interdisciplinary and collaborative training aimed at strengthening regional capacity in ocean science and marine resource management.



Held at the School of Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Technology at the University of Dar es Salaam on 20 to 26 September 2026, the programme attracted more than 800 applications, demonstrating the growing demand for advanced ocean science training across the WIO region and beyond. Established to equip students, early-career researchers and professionals with essential ocean science skills, COES-WIO builds on the success of its inaugural edition in Mombasa, Kenya. The second edition has also been endorsed as a United Nations Ocean Decade Action contributing to regional efforts to strengthen professional networks, develop practical skills, support innovative start-ups, promote community engagement in conservation and advance sustainable natural resource management in line with the priorities outlined in the African Ocean Decade Roadmap.

The 2026 programme aimed to provide 60 participants with hands-on training across five project tracks addressing key

regional ocean science priorities. These included small-scale fisheries, mariculture and post-harvest losses; shoreline change, habitat restoration and coastal resilience; physical and chemical oceanography; marine plastics and pollution; and ecological survey techniques and data management.

Through field-based activities, practical exercises, data analysis, mentorship and collaborative learning, participants gained experience relevant to addressing pressing marine and coastal challenges.

The programme was made possible through principal funding support from the University of Michigan and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO's Sub-Commission for Africa and the Adjacent



Island States, alongside a strong regional partnership involving the Tanzania Fisheries Research Institute, the University of Dodoma, Tanzania's Marine Parks and Reserves Unit, the Sustainable Ocean Alliance Hub Tanzania, the Early Career Ocean Professionals Programme and WIOMSA.

The strong response to COES-WIO underscores the need to expand access to high-quality, practical ocean science training across the region. As preparations for the third cohort take shape, the programme aims to mobilize sustainable financial and in-kind support from development partners, research institutions, government agencies, private-sector organizations and philanthropic foundations. This support would enable COES-WIO to accommodate

more participants while working towards equitable gender representation, with a target of 50 percent women and 50 percent men from across the WIO region and beyond.

It would also strengthen the quality and reach of the programme through expert instruction, mentorship, field-based learning, professional networking and regional collaboration. By investing in the next generation of ocean professionals, COES-WIO aims to build a stronger, more connected and better-equipped regional community capable of advancing ocean science, informing sustainable resource management and delivering practical solutions for the future of the WIO.

Photos: COES-WIO 2026

To expand the impact of this programme, contact coes-wio-2026instructors@umich.edu and learn more about the school via <https://www.coeswio.org>

READING THE OCEAN'S GENETIC FINGERPRINTS

| By Edwin Mwashinga



Africa and its adjacent island states are home to 439 key marine biodiversity areas humming with an extraordinary wealth of ocean life. Yet, a staggering share of that biodiversity has never been formally documented. Species move, hide and thrive largely unseen and traditional survey methods can only tell part of the story.

That's where environmental DNA (eDNA) comes in. Every organism that passes through water leaves behind a trace of skin cells, mucus and waste – a genetic fingerprint suspended invisibly in the sea. By sampling and sequencing eDNA, scientists can detect which species are present without ever needing to see, catch or disturb them. This enables biodiversity monitoring that is simple, cost-effective and remarkably precise.

In August, for two intensive weeks, 30 ocean scientists from 14 countries across eastern and southern Africa, including a strong contingent of early career ocean professionals, immersed themselves in the subject of eDNA, one of the most powerful tools in modern marine science.

As the training unfolded at Pwani University on Kenya's north coast, a room full of scientists from vastly different corners of the continent became a connected community equipped, energized and ready to help write the next chapter of ocean science in Africa.



Participants collecting field samples in the Watamu marine protected area

Participants worked through the entire eDNA pipeline, from field sampling, laboratory analysis of water samples and data analysis using bioinformatics. In addition, networks were built, confidence was developed and a strong shared purpose to advance ocean science by Africans, for Africans was formalized.

The training was made possible through the collaboration of the [Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO's Sub-Commission for Africa & the Adjacent Island States](#), the [OceanTeacher Global Academy \(OTGA\)](#), the [International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange programme](#), [Pwani University](#), the [Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute](#), [OTGA Regional Training Center at the University of Ghana](#), with co-sponsorship from the [Ocean Decade Capacity Development Facility](#).

Participants walked away with:

- **a sharpened understanding** of eDNA technology and its real-world applications;
- **hands-on skills** in collecting and preserving eDNA samples in the field;
- **practical, tested experience** extracting eDNA in the lab;
- **the ability to analyse** eDNA data using bioinformatics tools; and
- **a working knowledge** of how eDNA can be applied to assess marine biodiversity and monitor ecosystems across the region.



Participants engaging in laboratory work

WHO PAYS FOR PROTECTION? FIVE RESEARCHERS TAKE ON MARINE CONSERVATION FINANCE

Marine conservation in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) is expanding rapidly. Countries are increasing and strengthening marine protected areas (MPAs), supporting locally managed marine areas (LMMAs) and advancing blue economy strategies. However, a persistent challenge remains: how to sustainably finance conservation systems over the long term.

Many conservation initiatives continue to rely on fragmented, short-term and donor-dependent funding; existing financing systems are vulnerable to economic and geopolitical shocks. As conservation ambitions grow, financial systems must evolve to become more coordinated, diversified and resilient.

To support this transition, stronger evidence is needed on financing gaps, revenue diversification, governance design, risk management, equity and the link between financial stability and conservation performance.

WIOMSA, through its Marine Research Grant Programme and in partnership with the Blue Nature Alliance, invited early career ocean professionals and Master's and PhD students to submit applied, field-based research proposals that contribute to strengthening marine conservation finance in the WIO.

Presented here are snapshots of the research of the five grantees who were selected from 164 applications.



Fezeline Francisca Alexah is an MSc student at the University of Toliara, Madagascar. Her study compares the funding pathways and institutional resilience of three to four MPAs and LMMAs in southwest Madagascar, selected for their differing governance models – non-governmental organization (NGO)-managed, community-managed, co-managed and government-managed.



Manuel Lélio Alberto Gungulo is a Master's candidate in Applied Marine Sciences at Eduardo Mondlane University and Blue Economy Lead of the MUVA Foundation in Mozambique.

His study analyses the management costs and financing gaps across the country's six legally designated marine conservation areas, combining quantitative costing with a qualitative assessment of governance, human resources, community relations and financial management.



Shakeel Yavan Jogee will lead a study to examine how NGO-led voluntary marine conservation areas (VMCAs) in Mauritius are financed across their lifecycle and why recurrent costs such as monitoring, maintenance and coordination often remain underfunded once establishment grants end. It will map the true cost of sustaining a VMCA, the financing strategies in use and the institutional factors behind resilience.



Pauline Sidi Safari is a Fisheries Officer at Coastal and Marine Resource Development in Kenya. Her study assesses the current and future financial requirements for effective management of Kenya's MPA network and generates evidence to support sustainable financing under the 30x30 target. It quantifies the current costs of managing MPAs, assesses financing sources and expenditure patterns, identifies financing gaps and examines infrastructure, workforce and future management needs.



Arnold Mkama is a Community Conservation Warden for the Marine Parks and Reserves Unit in the Mnazi Bay-Ruvuma Estuary Marine Park in Tanzania. His study assesses the management costs, financing needs and operational capacity of MPAs in Tanzania. It identifies key gaps in financial management, human resources, infrastructure, operations and governance. The findings will support sustainable financing and effective management of Tanzania's MPAs and long-term 30x30 conservation target.

TURNING DATA INTO DECISIONS

| *By Jenny Hertzman*

For five days in September, around 30 marine park managers, rangers and conservation wardens from Tanzania and Zanzibar gathered on Mafia Island to explore how new technologies can strengthen marine conservation.

Rather than focusing on lectures, the workshop emphasized practical fieldwork. Participants used drones, smartphones and GIS tools to collect and analyse data, testing how these technologies can support adaptive management and evidence-based decision-making in marine protected areas.

Tanzania's marine ecosystems face growing pressure from coral bleaching, mangrove degradation and illegal fishing. Adaptive management is widely recognized as essential, but many marine park staff lack the tools and data needed to make timely decisions.

Tools that are changing everything

Drones were used to identify mangrove clearing, detect illegal fishing gear and monitor coastal habitats, highlighting challenges such as weather conditions, permits and the need for trained pilots.

Participants used smartphones with the QField app to document geotagged observations and upload them in real time, improving reporting and monitoring.

GIS tools combined these data sources to help participants identify hotspots of illegal fishing, mangrove loss and coral damage.

"Before, we had spreadsheets of patrol reports," said David Kabodo from Tanga Coelacanth Marine Park. "Now, we have maps that show exactly where to focus our efforts."

To test the tools, participants split into mangrove and coral monitoring teams. Near Utende Beach, the mangrove team used drones and smartphones to document vegetation loss, erosion and signs of human activity. The data showed that degradation was concentrated near access paths, not randomly distributed.

"We thought mangrove loss was random," said Jovan Tarimo from Dar es Salaam Marine Reserves. "But the data showed it was concentrated near access paths. That changes everything about how we patrol."



The coral team recorded bleaching, seagrass extent, plastic pollution and damage from fishing gear and anchors and found that tourism was affecting some reef areas.

The final days focused on turning data into action; analysing results, prioritizing actions and integrating the tools into existing management processes.

“This isn’t just about technology,” said Maria Pentzel, from the Marine Parks and Reserves Unit HQ. “It’s about changing how we work – from reactive to proactive, from guesswork to evidence-based decisions.”

Participants called for stronger collaboration through the Western Indian Ocean Marine Protected Areas Management Network (WIOMPAN) Tanzania Chapter to share knowledge and cooperate across the country’s marine protected areas.

“We’re not just protecting individual parks,” said Amin Abdallah, from the WIOMPAN Tanzania Chapter. “We’re building a movement that can transform marine conservation across Tanzania.”



For many participants, the workshop showed how accessible technologies, combined with practical skills and collaboration, can strengthen conservation. As pressures on Tanzania’s marine ecosystems grow, better data and informed decisions will become increasingly important for protecting them.



For further information, email jenny.hertzman@havochvatten.se
or visit www.havochvatten.se/swam-ocean

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR AFFORDABLE COASTAL MONITORING

By Alvin Ouma, Timothy Mtemi, Eunice Ndeso, Anthony Chege, Muhsin Zuberi, Maurine Kerubo, Justine Getonto, Collins Kataka, Doreen Alwala, Robert Weria, Sakariye Hashi, Hassan A. Mao and Dennis Sifuna



All participants with the trainers, Marie-Alexandrine Sicre and Sabine Schmidt (CNRS), Greg Cowie (COLab), Prof Bernerd Fulanda (Pwani University), Benoit Hazard (Director of CNRS office in Nairobi) and Prof James H.P. Kahindi (Vice Chancellor of Pwani University)

At the 2026 VOKCE-COLab summer school in Kilifi, Kenya, field observations were linked with laboratory analyses and data treatment to investigate coastal water quality and assess the practical use of affordable monitoring tools.

The joint VOKCE-COLab summer school

The second Summer School on Environmental Monitoring of Coastal Socio-Ecosystems brought together 15 participants from three Western Indian Ocean countries to build skills in monitoring coastal environments. Hosted by Pwani University from 31 August to 9 September 2026, the training was organized by the VOKCE (Vulnerability Of Kenyan Coastal Ecosystems under climate and non-climatic stressors) project, funded by the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) and Expertise France (Sustainable Western Indian Ocean Programme 3 European Union project). It was run in partnership with the Coastal Observation Lab in a Box (COLab) initiative and involved Pwani University, the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute and the University of Nairobi.

The joint initiative aims to develop low-cost tools and standardized methods for measuring essential physical, biological and chemical variables in coastal waters. By building technical and scientific expertise, the summer school fostered knowledge-sharing, and capacity-building for coastal socio-ecosystem monitoring.

Field surveys and coastal monitoring

Surveys in Kilifi Creek combined several methods: sampling referenced by global positioning system; conductivity, temperature and depth profiling with both commercial and open-source instruments; current measurements and observations of dissolved oxygen and turbidity. Participants compared low-cost colorimeters and fluorimeters with commercial instruments and then linked the physical conditions to water chemistry. These surveys gave a snapshot of coastal conditions; identifying pollution sources or long-term trends requires further evidence.

In addition to routine monitoring of water-quality, participants collected samples for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). These activities introduced ways of investigating pollution in coastal waters and complementing field sensor and suspended particulate matter (SPM) measurements.

Laboratory practicals linked field sampling to the analysis of chlorophyll a, phosphates, nitrates and SPM. Participants used fluorimetry to measure pigments and fluorescence,

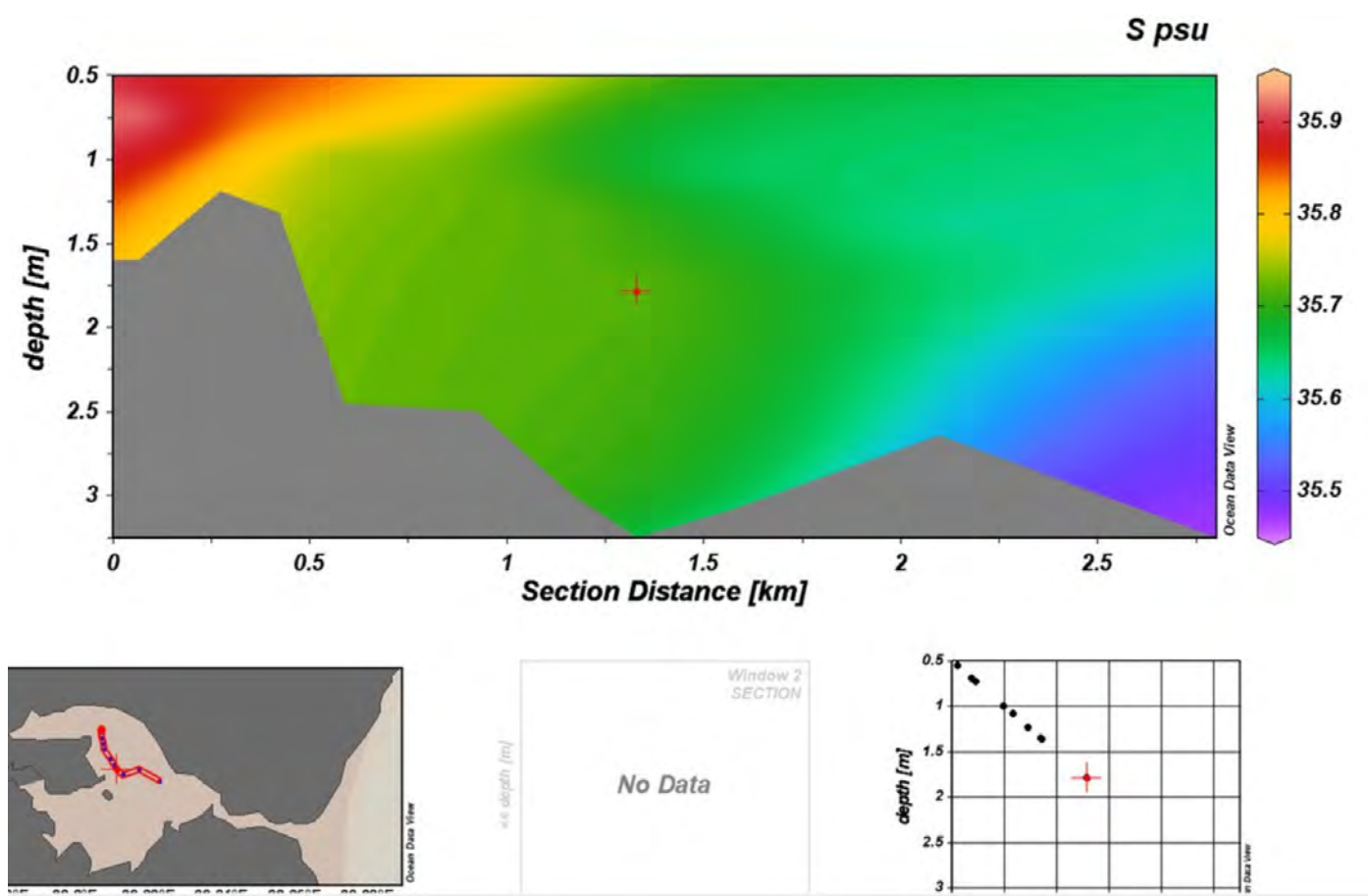
UV-Vis spectrophotometry to determine nutrient concentrations and the gravimetric method to measure SPM. Together, these measurements support an SPM-turbidity relationship for assessing suspended material across sampling stations. An atmospheric sampling station was also set up on the Pwani University campus to begin monitoring of atmospheric PAHs.

Following each sample from collection through to analysis strengthened participants' understanding of how field and laboratory procedures influence results. Together, nutrients, chlorophyll a, dissolved oxygen and SPM provide

insights into primary production, phytoplankton biomass, water quality and light availability. They also help to interpret nutrient enrichment alongside sediment resuspension, dilution and water exchange.

Data processing included data analysis and visualization using Ocean Data View. The participants were also trained on open data and data repositories.

Ocean Data View visualization of salinity distribution in the Kilifi creek analysis.



Strengthening coastal monitoring for informed decisions

The summer school covered sampling design, instrument operation, laboratory analysis and data interpretation, equipping participants to strengthen monitoring at their institutions. Its observations offer a foundation for identifying key questions and locations for further study. Repeating the survey across tides and seasons would build consistent, traceable evidence to support marine spatial planning, pollution management and coastal ecosystem protection.

The VOKCE training school also included a visit to FabLabs in Mombasa. The visit connected coastal monitoring needs with local technical innovation, highlighting opportunities to develop, adapt and maintain affordable sampling equipment and sensor components.

The organizers of the summer school were Marie-Alexandrine Sicre and Sabine Schmidt (CNRS), Greg Cowie (COLab) and Bernerd Fulanda (Pwani University).

MOVING BEYOND THE MAP: LaSMMI CONNECTS SEAGRASS SCIENCE, CARBON AND CONSERVATION



LaSMMI
Large-Scale Seagrass Mapping
and Management Initiative

**Seagrass Science
Into Action Webinar**

A regional webinar and practical training in Mozambique highlighted how LaSMMI is linking seagrass mapping with policy action and expanding research capacity across the Western Indian Ocean.



Seagrasses are critical ecosystems for nature, people and climate, yet they remain undervalued and under protected because basic information regarding their location and extent is often lacking. The Large-Scale Seagrass Mapping and Management Initiative (LaSMMI) is working to close this data gap. But knowing where seagrass grows is only the beginning. Understanding its condition, quantifying the carbon it stores and putting that evidence into policy and management decisions are essential steps to securing this ecosystem.

To advance these priorities, LaSMMI convened a regional webinar and hands-on training in Mozambique in September 2026.

On 14 September, WIOMSA, the University of Southampton and The Pew Charitable Trusts convened “*LaSMMI: Seagrass Science into Action*”. The webinar showcased progress across Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and Madagascar, exploring how field research, institutional capacity, and engagement with policymakers can help transform the data collected under LaSMMI to inform lasting conservation action.

BUILDING THE EVIDENCE – and the teams behind it

To develop field -verified seagrass maps for Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania including Zanzibar, LaSMMI uses harmonised approach that combines intertidal walking transects, snorkelling, SCUBA diving and live-feed drop cameras. This allows researchers to adapt surveys to different coastal environments while generating comparable evidence across the region.

In KENYA, scientists at the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRRI) are working towards a field-verified national baseline, addressing discrepancies between earlier studies. The documentation of previously unrecorded meadows of the vulnerable *Zostera capensis* provides a clear example of the value of this work.

In TANZANIA, the University of Dar es Salaam’s School of Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries is involving marine protected area rangers and district fisheries officers directly in surveys, helping retain monitoring expertise within local institutions. In Mozambique, a youth-led research team is developing the skills and confidence needed to conduct surveys independently.

Meanwhile, MADAGASCAR’S extensive coastline presents a considerable surveying challenge. At the Institut Halieutique et des Sciences Marines (IHSM), Early Career Ocean Professionals are helping plan, budget and lead expeditions. By the time of the webinar, the team reported collecting more than 108,000 georeferenced ground-truth images along 230 kilometres of survey tracks.

**THESE EFFORTS ARE BUILDING MORE THAN DATASETS:
they are strengthening the people, skills and institutions
needed to sustain seagrass research across the WIO.**



Making science count in policy

The webinar's policy discussions reinforced a central message: better maps do not automatically produce stronger protection. Scientific evidence needs institutional ownership, political commitment and a clear route into decision-making.

Drawing on Seychelles' commitment to protect its seagrass meadows by 2030, speakers highlighted that governments need not wait for exhaustive datasets before taking action. Initial mapping can help establish priorities, build political support and inform further investment. In Kenya, participants described Fauna & Flora's work to raise seagrass visibility within national conservation planning and encourage ownership across fisheries, wildlife and environment agencies.

Participants also called for standardised surveys to become part of routine marine protected area assessments, and for seagrass evidence to inform Nationally Determined Contributions and marine spatial planning.



[Watch the recording on YouTube](#)

Beneath the meadows: measuring soil carbon

From 28–30 September 2026, LaSMMI partners gathered in Mozambique for hands on training for collecting seagrass soil cores for carbon assessment. Participants from across the regional partnership developed shared skills in sediment coring based on standardized global methods, for collecting samples to assess the carbon stored in the seagrass meadows.

The training addressed a critical limitation of mapping alone. Although maps establish meadow distribution, they cannot reveal how much carbon a particular site stores. Carbon stocks vary between locations, making direct field measurements essential for locally grounded assessments.

Combining sediment measurements with LaSMMI's maps will help build a more complete blue carbon picture for Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique and Tanzania, including Zanzibar. The training strengthened regional capacity to generate this evidence and support better-informed conservation and climate planning.



From mapping to action

LaSMMI's September activities demonstrated the complementary efforts needed to move beyond mapping: documenting seagrass meadows, assessing their carbon stocks, equipping regional researchers with practical skills and connecting scientific findings with policy. Together, these efforts are helping build the evidence and capacity needed to strengthen seagrass conservation across the Western Indian Ocean.

BUILDING COASTAL RESILIENCE IN MAURITIUS | By Pricila Iranah



A visit to Ferney Tropical Agrihood with team members, Lou Rayas with the Ferney Valley Conservation Manager Alexandre Herve and the planters that were invited by the landowners to grow food crops and medicinal herbs on a section of their land

The Indian Ocean Islands Foundation team, led by Pricila Iranah and Raphael Merven concluded its SCALABLE-commissioned project with a restitution workshop in August 2026. The project's working group set out to identify opportunities for using ancestral, traditional and modern land- and sea-based practices to build the resilience of Mauritian communities to social, economic and environmental shocks.

The workshop was held under the aegis of the Ministry of Youth and Sports at the Mahebourg Youth Centre, chosen for the project's geographic focus.

The work focused on the east-southeast of Mauritius, from the top of the Bambous Mountain range down to the shoreline, mainly through the district of Grand Port. The east-southeast is home to some of the island's poorest communities, especially near the coast: fishers, boat operators, service industry workers, small business owners and people who depend on assistance. On the slopes, most land is owned by the descendants of colonizers who now run large sugarcane, real estate and tourism businesses. The area also holds one Important Bird and Biodiversity Area, one Key Biodiversity Area, two Ramsar sites, two fishing reserves, five islet national parks and several private ecotourism forest reserves.

In 2020, the M/V *Wakashio*, owned by Nagashiki Shipping, ran aground on the coral reef barrier off the east-southeast, causing an ecological, economic and social catastrophe along 30 km of coastline. At the time, the team assessed the social impact of COVID-19 and the oil spill¹ and the dependence of coastal communities on mangrove ecosystems.² Both found limited capacity for recovery among at-risk communities, which led the team to examine what builds resilience across environmental and socioeconomic dimensions.

The working group comprised the project team, academic experts and representatives of environmental and social non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the east-southeast. Together they developed a Needs Assessment Survey and sent it to key informants: funders, other NGOs, local and national authorities and private sector operators in the area.

The findings showed needs in three broad areas: climate adaptation and disaster preparedness, economic security, through livelihood diversification, vocational training, better-paid jobs and access to finance; and protection of coastal ecosystems and reliable basic services such as transport, running water, policing, emergency care and mental health support.

Yet efforts to meet these needs are consistently undermined by inadequate infrastructure; limited finances, staff and data; restricted access to transport, land, housing and jobs; an under-resourced police force; and low public awareness and civic responsibility.

The project team then built the [Needs Match Platform](#) which lets NGOs, social workers and businesses offer resources that match needs identified by NGOs working in at-risk communities. The team is handing it over to Ecosud's Mycelium project, a network of 13 environmental and social NGOs working on shared community challenges.

The needs assessment highlighted how traditional and ancestral practices build resilience. This subject was explored by Vasisht Seetapah through interviews. For instance, during pandemic lockdowns, women relied on gleaning and fishing for food, while the older generation of fishers continues to use natural cues rather than

electronics to read the sea and weather. In contrast, younger adults favour technology and skipping tourist boats, learning fishing through social media. Catch-and-release fishing, once rare in Mauritius, has also grown in popularity.

Internships supported undergraduate and Master's degree students. One study found that despite agrochemical risks and organic farming programmes, organic production is uneconomical for small-scale planters with limited market access. Backyard growers, however, often grow organic produce for household use and to share with family and friends.

Agriculture can strengthen economic resilience, but systemic barriers, especially land access, must be addressed. Historically, communities and small planters could grow vegetables and other crops on sugarcane land between harvests.

Agricultural mechanization and real estate development, alongside coastal degradation and privatization of the coastline for villas and hotels are restricting communities' access to land and coastlines, eroding traditional food resilience and knowledge. These challenges are widespread and the team hopes its findings open the door to community-led solutions and transformations.

The interns on this project were Lou Rayas, Nawel Kurmoo and Deeya Jahajeeah.



A visit to La Ferm CoCo, an organic and permaculture farm in Bambous Virieux by team members, Lou Rayas, Raphael Merven, Anbreene Bilkis Mungroo and Pricila Iranah, with the owner Christine Rouillard



REGIONAL PARTNERS ADVANCE MANGROVE AND SEAGRASS ASSESSMENTS



Representatives from Kenya and Tanzania met in Zanzibar in August 2026 to advance mangrove assessments and strengthen national assessment capacity using the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Ecosystems framework.

Organized by the IUCN ReSea Project, WIOMSA and the Western Indian Ocean Mangrove Network, the hands-on workshop supported the first mangrove Red List of Ecosystems (RLE) assessments in the two countries. Technical input was provided by the South African National Biodiversity Institute and Coastal Oceans Research and Development – Indian Ocean (CORDIO). Participants strengthened their capacity to apply RLE Criteria C and D, evaluate ecosystem indicators and finalize national assessment reports.

These criteria examine environmental degradation and disruption of ecological processes – helping assess

ecosystem condition beyond changes in habitat area alone. The resulting reports will inform future assessments across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) and contribute to ongoing global mangrove evaluations.

Alongside the workshop, a regional coordination meeting for the Seagrass RLE Assessment advanced preparations for the Red List chapter of the WIO Seagrass Synthesis Report. These activities are critical for building regional expertise and providing a stronger evidence base for identifying ecosystem risks, setting conservation priorities and guiding management across the WIO.

COMMUNITY-LED CONSERVATION CAN HELP SAFEGUARD KENYA'S BLUE CARBON | *By Simangele Sithole*



When local communities are supported to manage their marine resources, they can contribute meaningfully to climate mitigation, biodiversity conservation and coastal livelihoods.

Community-managed marine areas can store seagrass blue carbon at levels comparable to formally protected marine parks, according to a new study published in Scientific Reports. Led by Simangele Sithole, with co-authors Cornelius Okello and Margaret Awuor Owuor, the study examined how different marine conservation approaches influence soil organic carbon storage in the seagrass meadows of the Lamu Archipelago in northern Kenya.

Seagrass meadows are increasingly recognized as important blue carbon ecosystems because they capture carbon and store it in the sediments beneath them. They also support fisheries, stabilize shorelines, improve water quality and provide habitat for marine biodiversity. Yet, across much of the Western Indian Ocean (WIO), seagrass ecosystems remain underrepresented in blue carbon research, policy and finance compared with mangroves.

The study compared seagrass meadows across three management contexts: a government-managed marine protected area (MPA), a locally managed marine area (LMMA) and unmanaged sites. The results showed that soil organic carbon stocks were highest in the MPA, intermediate in the LMMA and lowest in unmanaged areas. Importantly, the study found no significant difference in soil carbon storage between the MPA and the LMMA.

This suggests that community-led conservation can help maintain important blue carbon stocks while allowing regulated resource use by coastal communities.

This study shows that protecting seagrass does not have to depend only on strict, top-down conservation. **When local communities are supported to manage their marine resources, they can contribute meaningfully to climate mitigation, biodiversity conservation and coastal livelihoods.**

The findings also showed that management status alone does not explain carbon storage. Sediment type, seagrass canopy cover and human disturbance were important factors, influencing how much carbon was stored in the soil. Fine-grained sediments, particularly clay-rich soils, were linked to higher carbon retention, while disturbed and sandy, unmanaged sites stored less carbon. This has

important implications for blue carbon planning. **It shows that conservation and restoration priorities should not be based only on whether an area is protected, but also on local ecological conditions and levels of disturbance.** Sites with dense seagrass cover, stable sediments and lower disturbance may offer stronger opportunities for long-term carbon storage.

For Kenya, the study adds to the growing evidence base needed to support blue carbon policy, marine spatial planning and sustainable finance. Kenya has already recognized blue carbon ecosystems in its Nationally Determined Contributions, however stronger local data are still needed to guide implementation and investment.

For the wider WIO region, the findings reinforce the importance of combining scientific research with community-based conservation. Many coastal communities already play a central role in managing marine resources.

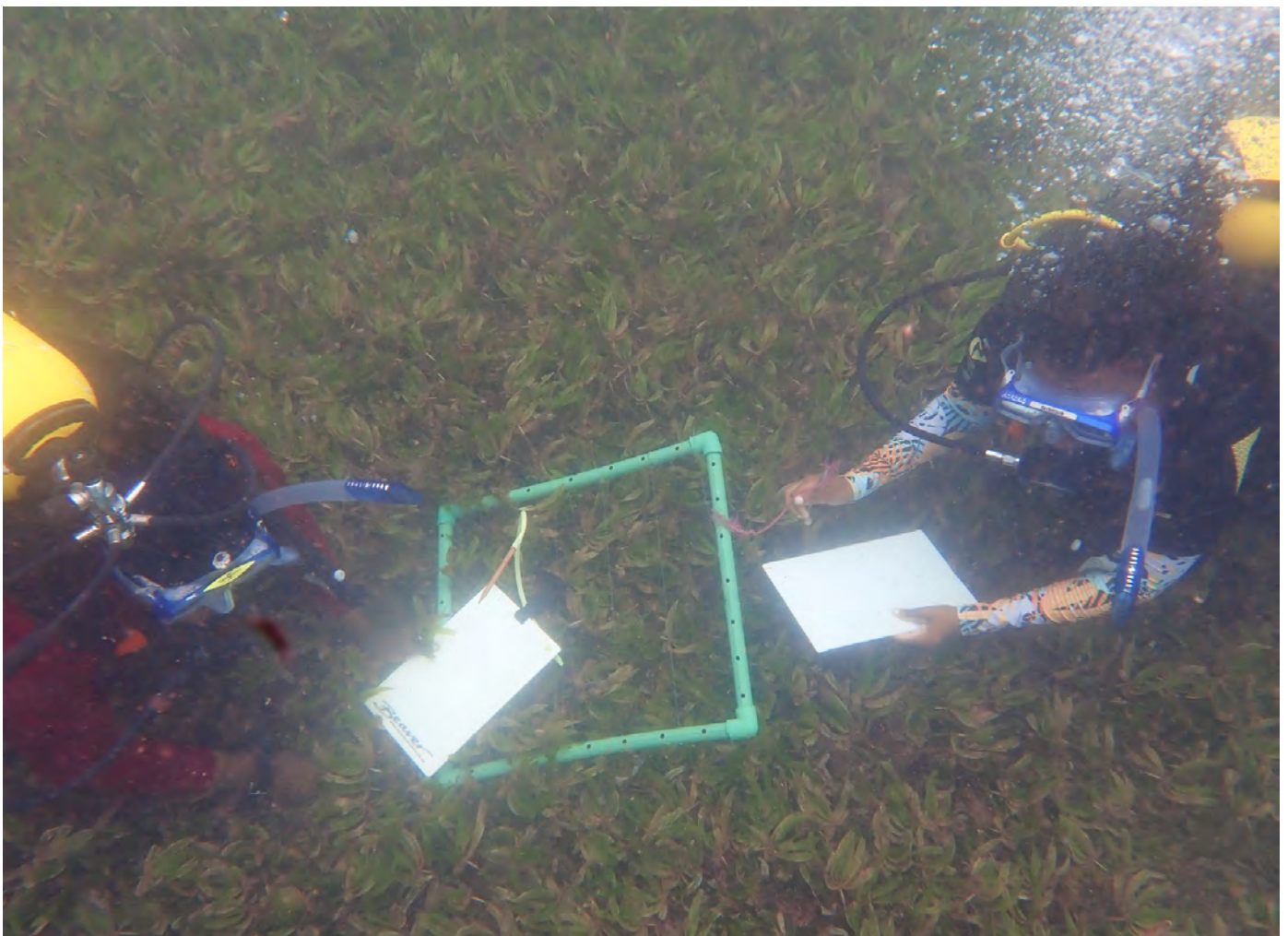
Recognizing and strengthening this local governance system could help countries protect seagrass ecosystems while also supporting livelihoods and climate goals.

The study also highlights the need for more field-based research, improved seagrass mapping and long-term monitoring across the region. It points to the value of locally-led approaches in building conservation models that work for both people and nature.

The research was supported by the Wyss Academy for Nature at the University of Bern and the Institute of Ecology and Evolution at the University of Bern. Field and laboratory work were funded by WIOMSA through the Marine Research Grant (Category I) and Global Monitoring for Environment and Security grants.

 [READ THE PAPER](#)

[Available here](#)



IMPROVING SEAGRASS IDENTIFICATION FOR BETTER CONSERVATION | By Blandina Lugendo



The study generated the first comprehensive ITS and *rbcl* DNA reference library for all 12 Tanzanian seagrass species.

Effective conservation and management of seagrass ecosystems depend on accurate species identification, but distinguishing some seagrass species using morphological traits alone is challenging because closely related species often share similar features. This has resulted in taxonomic uncertainty that affects biodiversity assessments, ecological studies and conservation planning.

To address this challenge, a nationwide assessment of seagrass diversity along the Tanzanian coast was conducted using an integrative approach that combined morphological identification with DNA barcoding. The study was supported by WIOMSA through the Marine Research Grant I programme (2020–2021). Seagrass samples were collected from the country's major seagrass habitats, including mainland Tanzania and the islands of Mafia, Pemba and Unguja. The study aimed to verify species identities and strengthen the molecular resources available for Tanzania and the wider Western Indian Ocean (WIO).

The study confirmed the occurrence of all 12 seagrass species currently recorded in Tanzania. Morphological identification proved reliable for most species when diagnostic characteristics were carefully examined. However, DNA analyses showed that closely related species within the genera *Halophila* and *Halodule* are easily confused because of overlapping morphological traits, leading to recurrent misidentifications. Combining morphological and molecular approaches resolved these taxonomic uncertainties and improved confidence in species identification. The molecular analyses also showed that Tanzanian seagrass populations form part of a broader Indo-Pacific genetic continuum, providing new insights into the diversity and biogeography of seagrasses in the WIO.

In addition to these findings, the study produced practical resources that will support future research and conservation. It generated the first comprehensive ITS and *rbcl* DNA reference library for all 12 Tanzanian seagrass species, substantially improving the molecular reference data available for Tanzania and the wider WIO region. This reference library provides an essential foundation for emerging DNA-based monitoring approaches, including environmental DNA. The study also developed an illustrated field identification guide describing the key diagnostic characteristics of all seagrass species recorded in Tanzania, providing a practical tool for researchers, students, conservation practitioners and coastal resource managers involved in biodiversity surveys and monitoring.

Effective management of seagrass ecosystems depends on accurate information on species diversity and distribution. The author recommends regular monitoring of seagrass meadows using standardized identification protocols that combine morphological identification with DNA barcoding where appropriate. The field identification guide and molecular reference library developed through this study should be incorporated into future biodiversity surveys and monitoring programmes to improve the accuracy and consistency of species identification across Tanzania and the WIO region.



READ THE PAPER

[Available here](#)

Seagrass meadows are among the most productive and valuable coastal ecosystems, providing habitat and nursery grounds for marine organisms, supporting fisheries, protecting shorelines from erosion, improving water quality and storing significant amounts of carbon.

LEARNING FROM THE REEF | *By Japhet Kaadzo Tembo*

In May and June 2026, I participated in the [Coral Farming training under the international Certificate in Sciences of Artisanal Maricultures](#), a two-month training programme offered by the [Institut Halieutique et des Sciences Marines \(IH.SM\)](#) of the [University of Toliara](#) and [University of Mons \(UMONS\)](#) in Belgium. Coming from Kenya, where I work with [WorldFish](#) in aquatic food systems, I arrived in Toliara, Madagascar hoping to learn more about coral reef restoration. I left with much more than technical knowledge. The experience gave me new perspectives on conservation, community engagement and regional collaboration in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region.

The programme combined classroom learning with extensive field activities. One of the highlights was visiting coral restoration sites in [Sarodrano](#), a coastal village near Toliara. Here, we worked alongside trainers and researchers to monitor coral nurseries, install restoration structures and observe how damaged reefs can be rehabilitated through practical interventions.



Coral fragment planting on coral tables (left) and coral rope nurseries at Sarodrano (right)

What made the training particularly memorable was the opportunity to learn directly from local communities. In villages such as Sarodrano and Ifaty we met community members involved in mariculture and coral restoration activities. Despite facing challenges such as limited access to essential services, many community members demonstrated remarkable commitment to protecting marine ecosystems. Their efforts reinforced an important lesson: conservation succeeds when local people are genuine partners rather than passive beneficiaries.



Coral farming participants interacted with the Reef Doctor organization (left) and with community members from the Ifaty community (right)

The programme also brought together participants from six countries across the WIO region. Through discussions, group work and shared field experiences, I gained insight into the different environmental and social realities that shape marine conservation efforts in neighbouring countries. This expanded my professional network and also highlighted the value of regional collaboration in addressing common challenges facing our coastal and marine ecosystems.



Coral farming participants at a social gathering



Coral farming participants at Madiorano beach (left) and using Pus Pus transport in Toliara (right)



Another highlight was participating in an international scientific symposium hosted during the programme. As an early-career researcher, engaging with scientists, practitioners and conservation professionals from across the region was both motivating and inspiring. The experiences highlight the importance of communicating science in ways that can inform management decisions and support practical conservation action.

An individual seminar presentation

NETWORKS

A NEW WAVE OF OCEAN ACTION | *By the WIO-ECOPs Coordination Team*



The Western Indian Ocean Early Career Ocean Professionals (WIO-ECOP) Network was launched during the 12th Conference of the Parties (COP12) to the Nairobi Convention in October 2026.

The launch marked an important milestone in strengthening youth engagement, professional collaboration and regional ocean action across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO).

WIO-ECOP aims to provide a vibrant, inclusive and sustainable regional platform that empowers youth and early- and mid-career ocean professionals working across ocean science, conservation, management, policy, education, engineering, innovation, entrepreneurship and related fields. The network builds on the legacy of the Western Indian Ocean Early Career Scientists Network (WIO-ECSN), established under WIOMSA.

The transition of WIO-ECSN to WIO-ECOP reflects the evolving priorities of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030), the ECOPs global programme and recognizes that addressing complex ocean challenges requires collaboration across disciplines, sectors and professions.



WIO-ECOP invites young people and early- and mid-career professionals working across ocean and coastal sciences and related fields to join the network and contribute to shaping the future of the WIO.

Register for membership by scanning the official registration QR code.

WIO-ECOP will work to strengthen opportunities for capacity development, knowledge exchange, collaboration and meaningful participation in ocean decision-making. The network's work is structured around five strategic pillars:

- **Leadership and capacity development** – strengthening professional skills, leadership, mentorship and career development opportunities.
- **Research, innovation and knowledge exchange** – promoting interdisciplinary research, innovation and the sharing of knowledge and experiences.
- **Partnerships and resource mobilization** – building strategic collaborations and mobilizing resources to support youth-led and early-career ocean initiatives.
- **Community and coastal resilience** – advancing community engagement, coastal conservation, resilience and sustainable blue economy solutions.
- **Institutional sustainability and governance** – strengthening transparent, inclusive and sustainable network structures that support the participation and contributions of diverse youth and ocean professionals.

For enquiries, partnerships, and collaboration opportunities, please contact: ecopwio@wiomsa.online

STRENGTHENING CONSERVATION THROUGH GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES | By Celina Razanajaosoa




WIMS REGIONAL WEBINAR

Strengthening conservation and well-being through gender transformative approaches

Case studies from Kenya and Madagascar

— Guest speakers —



Helen Anthem
Senior Technical Specialist, Gender at Fauna & Flora



Quinn Parker
PhD Candidate in the Oceans Department at Stanford University

Thursday, 01 October 2026
10:00 - 11:30 a.m EAT

Gender equity, conservation and community well-being were brought together recently in a regional webinar hosted by the Network of Women in Marine Science (WiMS). The session linked WiMS' commitment to professional development with practical strategies to dismantle the structural barriers limiting women's leadership in marine science. Held on 1 October 2026, the webinar attracted 196 participants across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) and beyond,

Opening the session, Helen Anthem, Senior Technical Specialist for Gender at Fauna & Flora, outlined the spectrum of gender integration, tracing a continuum from gender-blind to gender-sensitive, gender-responsive and ultimately gender-transformative approaches.

"The transformative ambition goes beyond acknowledging gender roles, it actively seeks to address the underlying social norms and power relations that sustain inequality," Helen Anthem emphasized.

To demonstrate how this functions in practice, Helen Anthem presented a pilot initiative conducted with CARE Kenya across two community conservancies, including the Pate Marine Community Conservancy. Using the

Social Analysis and Action (SAA) methodology, the project facilitated structured dialogues where men and women jointly questioned long-standing assumptions about household roles and natural resource governance.

By the end of the pilot project, over 170 community members were actively challenging restrictive norms. Within less than a year, participants reported:

- more equitable sharing of domestic responsibilities between partners;
- increased confidence among women to speak up in community assemblies; and
- greater trust in local conservation governance bodies.

While ecological impacts on marine species and habitats require longer-term monitoring, the pilot project provided compelling evidence that social norms can shift rapidly when communities drive the reflection process.

Recognizing women's roles and agency in Madagascar

Focusing on small-scale fisheries, Quinn Parker, PhD candidate at Stanford University, examined what it truly means for women to benefit from fisheries and exercise agency, defined as the capacity to make meaningful choices and act upon them.

Drawing from preliminary research in Madagascar's Bay of Ranobe, Quinn Parker applied the Reach, Benefit, Empower, Transform (RBET) framework to illustrate the gap between mere participation in fishing activities and having genuine influence over governance decisions.

In coastal Madagascar, women play vital roles in maintaining food security and offering informal credit during periods of hardship, sustaining social safety nets that conventional economic indicators overlook. However, structural inequities persist: an established female octopus collector, for instance, may extend crucial financial backing to local fishers yet possess minimal bargaining power when dealing

with commercial export buyers. Women also reported being rarely consulted on seasonal closure dates or gear restrictions directly affecting their livelihoods.

Learning across borders

Together, the Kenya and Madagascar case studies provided WiMS members with both a practical process for challenging harmful norms (SAA) and an analytical framework (RBET) for evaluating true influence.

By bridging empirical research with field experience, the webinar reinforced WiMS' core mission: ensuring that support for women's technical skills and leadership goes hand-in-hand with transforming the institutional environments in which they operate. For researchers and conservation organizations across the WIO region, this requires asking critical questions: **whose knowledge shapes conservation priorities, who controls key resources and who ultimately holds decision-making power?**

Quinn Parker highlighted that recognizing women's contributions requires evaluating decision-making power, differing socioeconomic contexts and local definitions of empowerment, concluding:

"Building multi-disciplinary conservation teams that integrate social scientists and gender specialists is essential to designing equitable marine management intervention."



MISSED THE LIVE SESSION?

You can access the full webinar recording and discussion on the [WIOMSA YouTube Channel](#).

ADVANCING RESEARCH, RESTORATION AND COMMUNITY ACTION IN MAURITIUS



Surveys encountered melon-headed whales on every visit, often in groups of 100 to 200 or more. Photo-identification recorded 272 individuals, with repeated sightings suggesting regular use of the area. Similar island-associated populations occur in Hawaii and French Polynesia. Local knowledge suggests that melon-headed whales have visited Mauritian waters for centuries. These findings highlight eastern Mauritius as an important conservation area that should be included in the country's emerging marine spatial planning process.



READ THE REPORT:

[Available here](#)

Restoration of blue carbon ecosystems project

After two years, the Restoration of Blue Carbon Ecosystems project has officially ended but its impact continues: 3 000 mangroves planted, a carbon sequestration laboratory established, two seagrass nurseries up and running and thousands of people

reached through awareness activities. Beyond these results, the project helped six women venture into beekeeping and build their own enterprise from the ground up.

The work continues. In Le Morne, six women harvested 26 kg of honey from the project's 30 beehives – their first-ever harvest. A further 40 beehives are planned to expand the initiative beyond the project. Months of training taught the women to care for their colonies and interpret their behaviour. The honey now stands as a testament to their hard work, patience and growing expertise.

The project also advanced scientific knowledge. Research in southwest Mauritius found that older mangroves store more carbon, reinforcing the importance of protecting and restoring these ecosystems. Environmental DNA analyses identified more than 300 species in mangrove and seagrass ecosystems, highlighting their rich biodiversity and ecological value.

This project is led by Odysseo & Odysseo Foundation, in partnership with Association pour le Développement Durable, Attitude Foundation and Eclasia Solidarité.

It is supported by the Fonds Business Biodiversité Océan Indien, administered by Expertise France under the Varuna Biodiversité programme–Air for Biodiversity in the Indian Ocean and funded by Agence Française de Développement.



Beekeepers with locally produced honey from beehives in mangroves

Protecting Saint Brandon's natural heritage

The Last Archipelago project team has deployed eight purpose-built tracking devices disguised as marine debris to trace plastic pollution pathways around the Saint-Brandon archipelago. Designed by project science lead and marine biologist Heather Koldewey and built by Al Davies of the Arribada Initiative, each device houses a satellite transmitter and antenna inside a 500 ml bottle engineered to mimic the buoyancy and drift of plastic waste. The devices provide real-time location data, tracking the routes plastic debris takes through ocean currents and identifying where it washes ashore.



The satellite transmitter and antenna housed inside a 500 ml bottle

Each transmission builds a growing dataset and helps to identify where interception and mitigation measures could be most effective. The study is ongoing with further findings expected as tracking data accumulates.

The project is supported by the National Geographic Society, led by National Geographic Explorers Prashant Mohesh and Heather Koldewey in partnership with the Saint Brandon Conservation Trust and Odysseo Foundation.

Unravelling the secrets of coral spawning

SCORE International launched the Indian Ocean Coral Seeding Initiative to bring sustainable coral restoration to the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region and beyond.

In October 2024, it set up a base in Mauritius with Odysseo, Odysseo Foundation, Eco-Sud and the University of Mauritius. The base and its team will function as a hub for research, training and coordination, helping expand sustainable coral restoration across the WIO. SCORE's approach uses corals' own sexual reproduction to complement existing restoration efforts, supporting long-term reef recovery and resilience by fostering genetic diversity.

Over the past two years, the joint team has studied coral reproduction in Mauritius through night-time snorkeling surveys to detect coral spawning. Monthly surveys around the full moon, carried out at several sites between October 2024 and March 2026, revealed the timing and diversity of coral spawning and led to a preliminary coral spawning calendar to guide future spawning surveys and coral seeding activities. The team has also bred corals from multiple species and the first SCORE-bred corals are now growing on Mauritian reefs, an important step towards building local restoration capacity and supporting coral restoration across the region.

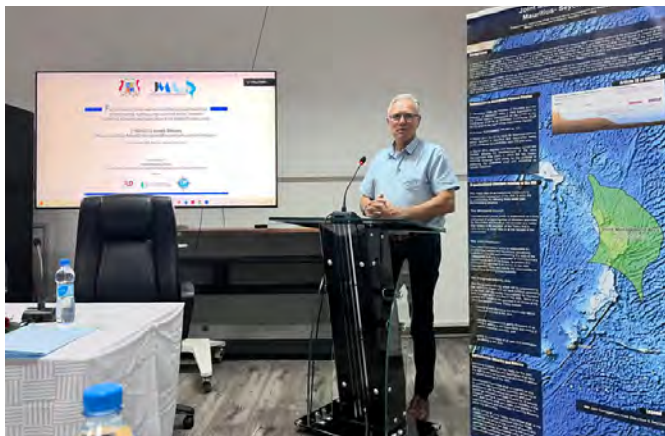
Sharing knowledge and expertise with practitioners in the WIO region and beyond is a key part of the initiative. SCORE's Training and Capacity Building Programme offers mentorship, hands-on training, joint field activities and digital exchange to strengthen local skills in coral spawning monitoring and restoration. The initiative has also built a growing regional coral spawning monitoring network of partners and volunteers.



A Coral Rearing In-Situ Basin (CRIB) deployed in Belle Mare, Mauritius. The CRIB provides a suitable environment for baby corals to settle and grow. Photo: SCORE Intl.

For more information about the project, contact Dr Gaëlle Quéré (SCORE/Odysseo) at email: g.querre@score.org

SEYCHELLES: ADVANCING OCEAN RESEARCH, GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



Island states chart a course for blue carbon

A new regional policy and research report, “Linking blue carbon hopes and realities to research, valuation and governance efforts in the island states of the South West Indian Ocean”, highlights the opportunities and challenges of advancing blue carbon science and governance across Seychelles, Mauritius and Madagascar. Contributing researchers from the University of Seychelles joined regional partners in examining how coastal ecosystems such as mangroves and seagrass meadows, alongside emerging “mobile blue carbon” from marine fauna, can support climate mitigation and sustainable development. The report proposes a roadmap to strengthen scientific research, policy integration, regional collaboration and innovative financing, positioning the southwest Indian Ocean as a leader in integrated blue carbon solutions.



Ocean Fair 2026 promotes marine science and ocean stewardship

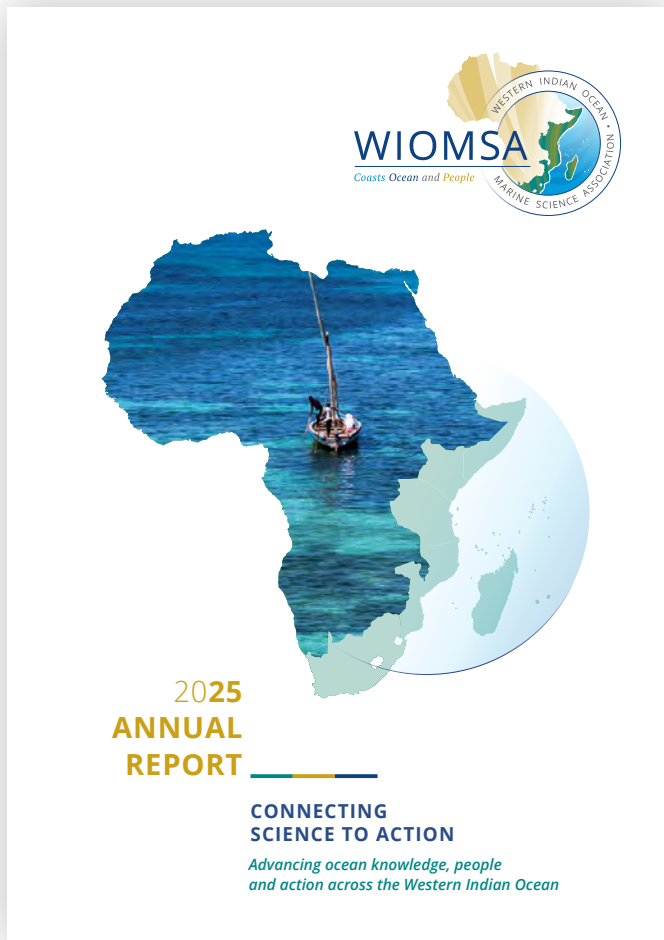
The 2026 Ocean Fair, an annual initiative of the Danny Faure Foundation, marked its fourth consecutive year, bringing together non-governmental organizations, government agencies, researchers, fish processing businesses, artisans and eco-schools to celebrate World Oceans Day and inspire greater public engagement in marine conservation. Through interactive exhibits, educational activities and hands-on learning experiences, the event highlighted Seychelles’ leadership in ocean stewardship and the importance of science communication in building ocean literacy. The Danny Faure Foundation, alongside its partners, used the fair to encourage young people and the wider public to explore marine science, innovation and sustainable ocean management, reinforcing the role of education in safeguarding the country’s blue natural heritage.

Study reveals public perceptions on ocean governance



A new study by researchers from the University of Seychelles provides the first nationally representative assessment of public perceptions of ocean governance, fisheries management and the blue economy in Seychelles. Published in Marine Policy and based on a survey of 674 respondents across Mahé, Praslin and La Digue islands, the research found high awareness of the term “blue economy” but limited understanding of its meaning. It also identified poor awareness of the Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan and marine protected areas (MPAs). Despite these knowledge gaps, respondents expressed strong confidence in fisheries management and MPAs, with the study recommending expanded public education and targeted communication to strengthen participation in marine governance and sustainable blue economy development.

NEW WIOMSA PUBLICATIONS



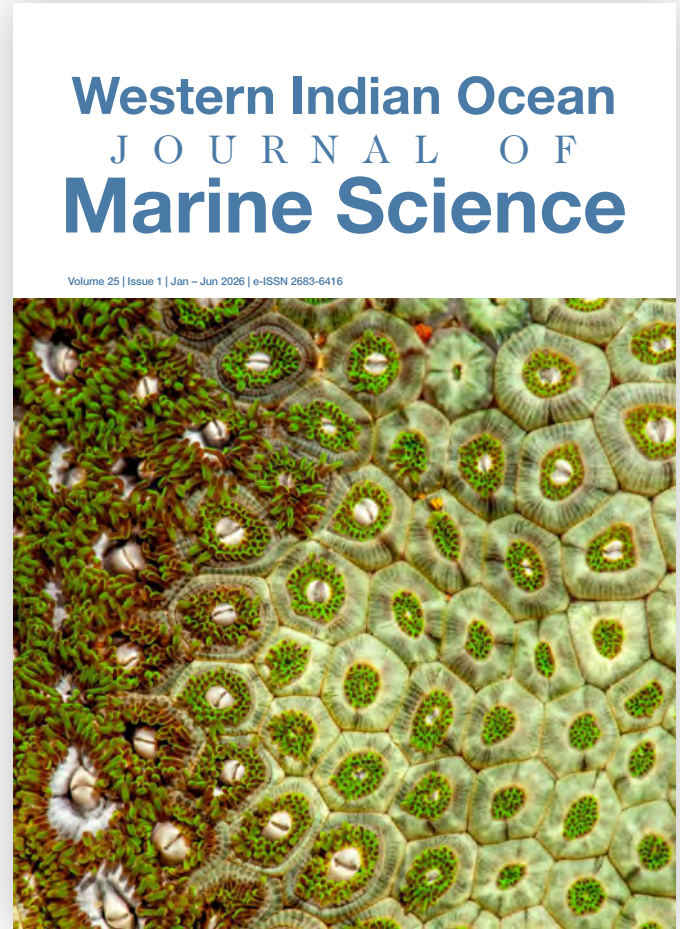
WIOMSA Annual Report 2025

In 2025, WIOMSA bridged marine science, policy, and practice across the Western Indian Ocean. From equipping marine spatial planners and strengthening MPA co-management to training the next generation of ocean leaders, here is how regional science translated into grounded action this past year.

To explore the in-depth data, project case studies, financial statements, and strategic lessons shaping the future of marine conservation across the WIO region.



[READ THIS ISSUE HERE](#)

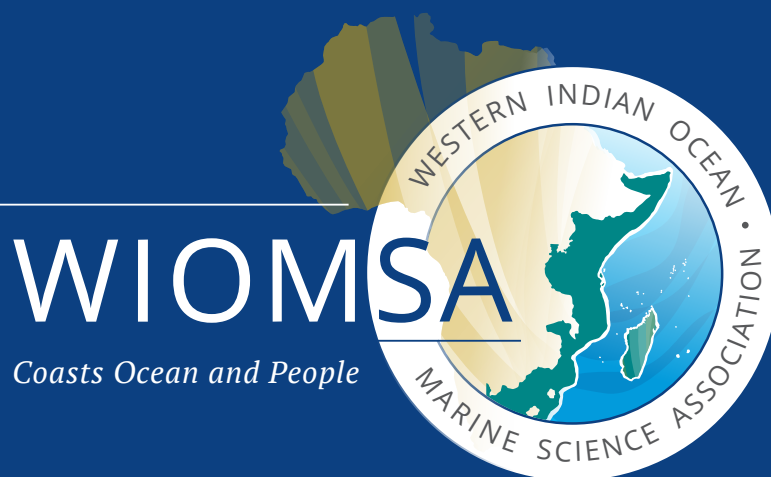


WIOJMS Volume 25 Issue 2

A new issue of the Western Indian Ocean Journal of Marine Science (WIOJMS) —Volume has been published. Volume 25, Issue 2 brings together the latest research and insights crucial for the future of the region's small-scale fisheries, marine ecosystems, and coastal communities.



[READ THIS ISSUE HERE](#)



WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN MARINE SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

MIZINGANI STREET, HOUSE NO. 734
P.O. BOX 3298, ZANZIBAR, TANZANIA.

P +255 24 22 33 472

secretary@wiomsa.org

www.wiomsa.org